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ABSTRACT

Youth who come in contact with the juvenile justice system are often disenfranchised by the education system. Despite research demonstrating that employability is critical to the success of high-risk youth, youth involved in the juvenile justice system often find it difficult to learn marketable skills or compete for jobs. According to a task force of researchers, program experts, market analysts, and representatives of private and public agencies, programs successfully linking court-involved youth to the labor market share the following elements: age-appropriate and comprehensive youth development; involvement of an adult advocate and the family; work-based learning and academic development; close attention to career development and job placement; and long-term follow-up. Programs serving court-involved youth can be divided into three categories: early intervention, residential, and aftercare. All three types of programs must combine quality job training and employment services with strategies to address the behavioral, educational, and social profiles of confined youth. The task force identified six primary systems affecting court-involved youth: juvenile justice, work force development, education, social services, community-based organizations, and the labor market. Enhancing collaboration, improving communication, and increasing these systems' knowledge of each other are among the challenges confronted by policymakers, program personnel, and court-involved youth. (MN)

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OJJDP FACT SHEET
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Employment and Training for Court-Involved Youth: An Overview

by Heather E. Frey

Court-involved youth are youth who come in contact with the juvenile justice system for committing a status offense or a delinquent act. Often disenfranchised by the education system and under juvenile justice system jurisdiction, these youth find it difficult to learn marketable skills or compete for jobs. Yet research demonstrates that employability is critical to the success of high-risk youth. The link between crime and lack of economic opportunity requires the country's more concerted attention through collaboration between employers, the juvenile justice system, and the workforce development system.

To help develop effective strategies for improving vocational training, reducing youth crime and recidivism, and improving the connections between court-involved youth and the labor market, the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA), and the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), funded the Home Builders Institute of the National Association of Home Builders to convene a Task Force on Employment and Training for Court-Involved Youth. The Task Force consisted of researchers, program experts, market analysts, and individuals representing businesses, corporations, foundations, and Federal, State, and local agencies.

The goals of the Task Force were to:

- Understand the diverse needs of court-involved youth.
- Identify the most promising mix of employment and training strategies to move court-involved youth into the mainstream.
- Define the roles and responsibilities of the agencies and organizations that work with court-involved youth to enhance training and employment opportunities.
- Recommend ways the workforce development, juvenile justice, education, social service, community-based support, and labor market systems can collaborate to provide effective job training and employment for court-involved youth.

Recognizing that the operational processes and purposes of the juvenile justice and workforce development systems are significantly different, the Task Force analyzed the vocabulary, governance structure, and programmatic nuances of each system. The findings of the Task Force are summarized in an upcoming OJJDP Report, *Employment and Training for Court-Involved Youth*. The Report, designed for policymakers and practitioners from each of these fields, provides an overview of the juvenile justice system, the workforce development system, and other major systems that must work together to provide services to court-involved youth. It also offers examples of effective practices, promising programs, and systems collaboration to help policymakers and service providers prepare court-involved youth for the job market.

Promising Programs

A key challenge for both policymakers and service providers is developing programs that prepare court-involved youth for jobs while also meeting developmental needs of youth, labor market requirements of employers, and safety and security needs of communities. According to the Task Force's Report, programs that successfully link court-involved youth to the labor market share the following elements:

- Age-appropriate and comprehensive youth development.
- Involvement of an adult advocate and the family.
- Work-based learning and academic development.
- Close attention to career development and job placement.
- Long-term follow up.

Programs that serve court-involved youth can be divided into three categories: early intervention, residential, and aftercare.

Early Intervention Programs

Early intervention programs are typically designed as prevention programs—either to divert youth from entering the juvenile justice system or to prevent youth from continuing their involvement with the system. The most effective early intervention programs use a variety of approaches, including mentoring, afterschool support, employment and training, school-to-work, and college access

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services. Intermediaries, such as community-based organizations, nonprofits, and job brokers, can provide consistent contacts for court-involved youth who are in the juvenile justice system or returning to the community after confinement. Similarly, a comprehensive, front-end assessment of a youth's needs when he or she enters the juvenile justice system can both facilitate referral to appropriate services and initiate tracking of the youth's progress.

Residential Programs

Approximately 30 percent of adjudicated delinquents are committed to residential facilities due to the severity of their needs or their threat to public safety. To provide quality job training and employment services, residential facilities must address the behavioral, educational, and social profiles of confined youth; the geographic isolation of many residential facilities; public safety concerns; and the belief by employment and training agencies and employers that confined youth will not meet performance standards. Effective residential employment and training programs include those that operate onsite businesses and employ youth at competitive wages, engage youth in community service and restitution projects, prepare youth for employment using an entrepreneurship or a service learning model, or train youth for specific jobs using industry-approved curriculums. These programs enable youth to develop practical skills they can use in the workforce after their release from residential facilities.

Aftercare Programs

Following their release from residential facilities, youth often remain the responsibility of the State juvenile justice or corrections agency and continue to require support services. Aftercare can provide critical services and support a youth's reintegration into the community. Aftercare programs that emphasize employment and training tend to be most effective when youth are in the community, are of legal working age, and have benefited from earlier services (i.e., counseling, basic skills, and interpersonal skills development). The most effective aftercare programs typically involve formal partnerships between the juvenile justice system and other institutions or organizations. Some programs direct court-involved youth to employment and training programs, create and tailor slots for court-involved youth in job training programs, or impart academic skills and knowledge through practical applications and "real work" projects. These programs create support networks that help youth develop appropriate attitudes and behaviors for participation in the community and the workforce.

Systems Collaboration

The Task Force identified six primary systems that affect court-involved youth: juvenile justice, workforce development, education, social services, community-based organizations, and the labor market. Effective job preparation requires the engagement of each of these systems.

There are some promising models of systems collaboration, and work is ongoing to develop a comprehensive approach to meet the diverse needs of court-involved youth. Enhancing collaboration, improving communication, and increasing the various systems' knowledge of each other are among the challenges confronted by policymakers, program personnel, and court-involved youth.

For Further Information

OJJDP will publish the full *Employment and Training for Court-Involved Youth* Report later in 1999. Copies of the Report will be available from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, 800–638–8736, or OJJDP's Web site: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org. Additional information is also available from the following Web sites: ETA (www.doleta.gov), or the Home Builders Institute (www.hbi.org).

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